DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 076 CS 012 389

AUTHOR Parker, Sharon; Wuelser, Ann
TITLE Current Research of Family Literacy Programs.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 13p.; Michigan Adult Educators Practitioner Inquiry Project (MAEPIP).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Class Activities; High Schools; *Intergenerational Programs; Learning Activities; Literature Reviews; *Parent Participation; Program Effectiveness; Research Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Family Literacy; Flint Community Schools MI; Intergenerational Learning

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates existing research about the strengths and weakness of current family litracy programs and presents a 98-item list of family literacy activities across the curricula for adult educators to promote intergenerational literacy. Educational experts feel that family literacy programs need more evaluation, and that the interaction among poverty, low literacy, and children's readiness for school needs more research. Current thinking on how to develop an effective family literacy program is shared and a family literacy project at Mott Adult High School in Flint, Michigan is described. The family literacy activities that conclude the paper are intended to be "homework" assignments that encourage successful family interaction. The activities in the paper are divided into sections on reading, science and nature, social studies, communication skills, and geography. Contains 9 references. (Author/RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CS

ED 393 076

CURRENT RESEARCH OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Michigan Adult Educators Practitioner Inquiry Project (MAEPIP)
1995
Sharon Parker and Ann Wuelser

ABSTRACT

Investigating existing research about the strengths and weaknesses of current family literacy programs is the focus of Sharon Parker's and Ann Wuelser's project. They seek to find out how successful the educational experts perceive the present programs to be. The experts feel these programs need more evaluation. The interaction between poverty, low literacy, and children's readiness for school needs more research. The current thinking on how to develop an effective family literacy program is shared. A family literacy project at Mott Adult High School in Flint, Michigan is described.

The second part of their project is a long list of projects across the curricula for adult educators to use to promote intergenerational literacy through "homework" assignments. These easy projects encourage successful family interaction, thus promoting the current theme in education that learning is a life long experience. Each individual at any age has something positive to contribute and to learn today.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Parker

M. Ann Wuelser

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS012389

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CURRENT RESEARCH OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Sharon Parker, Pre-GED and Reading, Mott Adult High School, Flint, Michigan
Ann Wuelser, Civics, Science, Writing, Mott Adult High School, Flint, Michigan

Michigan Adult Education Practitioner Inquiry Project (MAEPIP), 1995

Introduction and Statement of Problem

For one semester last year (1994-1995), I taught in a family literacy program at Mott Adult High School in Flint, Michigan. It was known as Project PLAY (Parents Learning About Young Children). Project Play was funded that year by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.. I enjoyed the class and observed the adult students making great strides in their enthusiasm and confidence as first teachers to their own children. Seeing the potential to reach two generations through family literacy programs such as this, I decided to research the topic as a part of my MAEPIP experience. At MAEPIP this fall, I was joined by Ann Wuelser. We wanted to find out what the experts thought were the strengths and weaknesses of family literacy programs and how extensive and successful these programs have been.

Current Literature
Unanswered questions:

In 1993 the Association for Community Based Education in Washington, DC, undertook a field evaluation of 14 community-based intergenerational literacy programs across the nation. On page 10 the report said:

> Since the mid 1980's, family and intergenerational literacy have gained national prominence as promising and effective approaches not only in addressing the educational needs of adults, but also in helping break the "cycle of illiteracy" within families...
>
> The rationale for these programs' approach is both simple and compelling: by strengthening the literary skills of parents, the educational experience and proficiencies of their children will increase. **Nevertheless, these programs have not been sufficiently evaluated to provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of what appears to be a theoretically sound concept (i.e., the generational transfer of basic educational skills), or that one program model is better than others.**

Likewise, Sandra Kerka (1991) writing for ERIC Digest on Family and Intergenerational Literacy had also warned that longitudinal studies were still needed in this field. She wrote:

Questions needing further study are (1) the relationship between family background and children's educational outcomes, (2) the effect of changes in family attitudes and behavior on children, (3) whether replication of a program model in different environments produces the same effects, and (4) the difference in the outcomes of various program types...

Some researchers ask: Do we change the behavior children learned in their cultural context to fit the requirements of the schools or do we change the practices of the schools to match the culturally learned behaviors? (Nickse 1990)

Victoria Purcell-Gates is one researcher who is trying to answer this question. Through ethnographic methods (observations in homes), she hopes to link home literacy with school readiness so the disadvantaged children can achieve more readily in the school environment. In 1993 she wrote:

We, as a nation, can no longer simplistically conclude that poverty results in low family literacy. The relationships--among poverty, literacy level of the family, and opportunities for young children to learn about print within the family context--are much more complex; and, at this time, the exact nature of these relationships is unknown. Thus, one of the crucial issues for research into family literacy is to describe better the separate and interdependent ways in which poverty, low literacy, and children's "readiness" to learn in school interact.

Favorable Research:

Despite these unanswered questions, family literacy programs have a basis for success in research. Purcell-Gates outlines the findings:

Much of this research suggests that (a) children acquire their basic cognitive and linguistic skills within the context of the family (Sticht & McDonald, 1989); (b) much literacy learning takes place in the years preceding formal instruction in the context of family-based interactions and activities (Taylor,1982); (c) school achievement and test scores are higher for children whose parents have more education and more books in the home (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1988); and (d) parents who are low-literate cannot support their children's literacy learning nor pass on positive attitudes

about schooling and the importance of learning to read and write (Newman & Beverstock (1990).

With all this strong research saying family literacy seems to be very important to the development of a child's readiness to read and write, it is no surprise that literacy programs involving families have proliferated during the past decade. These programs include those in which (a) adults are instructed alone; (b) adults and children are both involved, but instructed separately; and (c) adults and children learn together.

Action steps for developing an effective intergenerational literacy program as suggested by the Association for Community Based Education (1993) are:

- Eliminate barriers to participation through counseling and support services.
- Create a nonthreatening learning environment.
- Relate instruction to students' needs and interests.
- Create participatory learning structures.
- Conduct ongoing learner need assessments and educational planning.
- Involve learners in conducting program activities.
- Use a variety of instructional materials and methods.
- Use traditional and non-traditional evaluation techniques.
- Develop strong supportive linkages with other service providers.
- Seek consistent, reliable funding.
- Conduct ongoing, participatory program evaluation and improvement.
- Develop processes which allow the assessment, documentation and reporting of long and short-range impacts on all learners.
- Develop programs that build on the strengths of parents and their culture.

Local Application:

At Mott Adult High School in Flint, Michigan, Rita Langworthy, supervisor for Project PLAY, attempted to follow the above guidelines in the 1994-1995 school year. Funded by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, Project PLAY parents and children met once a week for 3 1/2 hours for 17 weeks. Lunch was followed by a parent/child interaction time which was planned and carried out by the parents. The children attended child care for the last hour while the parents planned for the following week's activities and checked out childrens' books from the classroom library to read at home with their children. The participants enjoyed a few fieldtrips and were encouraged to do "homework" of family activities during the week. Books and other crafts and games that encouraged literacy were also created.

In an interview Ms. Langworthy shared that the main purpose of the program was to help parents recognize and grow in their role as first teachers. She felt the strengths of the Mott Adult program were the real parent/child interaction, the flexibility of the format, and the good teachers. Proof of the success of Project PLAY was the .7 gain in grade level of the parents on the API (Adult Placement Indicator) reading test. The children were not tested due to

the pre-school age of many of them. Another sign of success is that many of the adult participants are asking for more classes like Project PLAY and are signing up for childcare classes where they will be trained to be employed in the child care field.

Ms. Langworthy would like to see Project PLAY improved and expanded with home visits by the staff and follow up phone calls to encourage parents to read and interact with their children. She would like to involve parents and their school age children through a cooperative program with an elementary school even to the point of flexible attendance credit with the child getting credit for attendance when he spends time at his parent's class and the parent getting credit when she visits her child's classroom. Ms. Langworthy plans to introduce "family portfolios" to assess the growth of all family members.

Recommendations

Because of the success of family literacy projects and their promise to bring literacy to whole families, Ann Wuelser and I suggest that all teachers of adults have the opportunity to have an impact on the families of the adults in their classrooms.

Wouldn't it be a powerful tool if every teacher across the curricula assigned the parents in their classroom "homework" to do with their children which would encourage literacy?

To this end we have compiled a list of suggestions for teachers of adults to use as "homework" to encourage family learning no matter what subject is taught. The list is by no means complete. It is meant as an inspiration for teachers. Teachers will inevitably come up with more ideas within the context of their specialty. Ann and I hope adult educators will continually keep in mind the fact that they can teach not only the adult in their classroom but also his/her children at home by occasionally assigning a "family project" for homework.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Applebee, A., Langer, J., and Mullis, I. (1988). "Who reads best? Factors related to reading achievement in grades 3, 7, & 11." Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

2. Association for Community Based Education, Washington, DC, "Effective Practices in Community Based Family Literacy: Results of a National Research and Evaluation Project," ERIC ED372295, (1993), p. 10 and p. 28.

3. Auerbach, E. R. "Toward a Social-Contextual Approach to Family Literacy." Harvard Educational Review 59, No.2, (May 1989): 165-181.

4. Kerka, Sandra. "Family and Intergenerational Literacy," ERIC Digest #111. ED334467, (1991).

5. Newman, A. P., and Beverstock, C. (1990). "Adult Literacy: Contexts & Challenges. " Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

6. Nickse, R.S. "Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs." Information Series No. 342. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, ED327736, (1990).

7. Purcell-Gates, Victoria. "Focus on Research. Issues for Family Literacy Research: Voices from the Trenches." Language Arts, Vol. 70, Dec. 1993, pp. 670-677.

8. Sticht, T. G., and McDonald, B. A. (1989). "Making the Nation Smarter: The Intergenerational Transfer of Cognitive Ability." San Diego, CA: Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences.

9. Taylor, D. (1982). "Family Literacy." Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

Family Literacy Projects

Reading:

- ABE students make books to read to their children at home.
- ABE students practice reading books and are videotaped reading.
- Read to children starting in their early months. Take children to public library weekly to select books of their liking.
- Encourage students who can read to become tutors. They will learn by teaching.
- Encourage families to take advantage of library programs and contests.
- Encourage grandparents to read to their own grandchildren or volunteer to read to other youngsters through churches or library programs.

Share these suggestions with adult students:

- After reading a story aloud, have the child make a picture book describing the story. Write the child's own words under the pictures. Send the book to a grandparent or favorite friend.
- Allow the child to be the librarian or teacher and tell you a story from memory. Encourage them to use good expression to interest the audience.
- Using colored paper, magazines, and scissors make a scrapbook about the life of child's favorite doll or pet.
- Have a dress-up day when everyone dresses as their favorite storybook character such as Amelia Bedelia or Tom Sawyer.
- Occasionally read above the child's intellectual level to challenge his mind.
- Allow time for mood setting before reading a story.
- Let child contribute to the story by making appropriate sounds or suggesting ways the story should end.
- Have a family choral reading time when the family performs poems and church liturgy together.

Using the newspaper at home:

- Read newspaper articles together. Ask child for a summary of the article or to relate two interesting ideas brought out in the article.
- Create a "family newspaper" to send to family members and friends.
- Create jingles and advertisements for newly invented products.
- Plan a budget for back to school clothes or for Christmas. Shop in the newspaper ads. Stay within the budget.

- Create a "Dear Abby" column with parent asking questions and child giving answers and visa versa.
- Parent and child discuss ads and how they make people want to purchase the product.
- Enjoy the sports pages together. Follow a favorite team or player for a few weeks to learn how to use the statistics provided.
- Prepare a newspaper recipe together.
- Read the movie reviews. Decide what movies to see together.
- Interpret charts and tables together. Look at a map to see where news events occur.
- Read and laugh together over the comic strips.
- Produce a current events scrapbook for one month.
- Read a Laura Ingles Wilder book. Have child call a grandparent to ask about their childhood. The child can compare their grandparents life with the life described in the book.
- Read Switcharound by Houghton Gifflin. Discuss changing lives with someone specific. This would be a good time to find a far away pen pal.
- Read Frederick by Leo Lionni. Discuss people that do special work like nurses, architects, and bricklayers.

Using the TV and VCR:

- Watch a situation comedy together. Identify the main characters, setting, plot, problem, ending. Did a character change? What caused the change?
- Turn the audio to no sound and allow child to narrate the story while watching it.
- Discuss favorite advertisements and why we like them.

Science and Nature:

- Take a nature walk around your neighborhood to look for nature items.
- Go through magazines and cut out pictures of animals. Look up information about these topics at the library.
- Using a plastic see-through pot, plant a seed so the child can see its roots grow.
- Encourage child to talk about his pet. Chart a routine for taking care of the pet. Read about the pet in a book.
- Make a picture of the good food pyramid. Allow child to prepare a different snack each week using healthy choices.
- Have a tea party for 2 or 3 friends. Try healthful snack selections.
- Have child cut out pictures of different kinds of weather. Discuss different activities and different moods affected by weather.

- Write vocabulary words on index cards with definitions on another card. Play a matching game with the cards.
- Make a coloring book about any science topic or buy a commercial one such as The Physiology Coloring Book by Kapit, Macey, and Meisami or The Biology Coloring Book by Griffin.
- Develop some riddles and ask child to make up some riddles about the science you are studying.
- Ask child to close her eyes and imagine she is a red blood cell traveling through the circulatory system. What did she see and feel? Read or watch a video of The Magic School Bus: Inside the Human Body.
- Listen to the rhythmic beat of heart. Listen to classical or popular music. Compare.
- Study great art of the human body such as by Leonardo da Vinci.
- Look at child's lifestyle in terms of good health. Decide where improvements can be made.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques.
- Read poems dealing with the heart or other science topic.
- Discuss the ethics of organ transplants or other issues caused by medical advances.
- Make a mini-terrarium to see ecosystem in action.
- Use the library resource books that adapt easy investigations to any age child such as Great Explorations in Math and Science.
- Study daylight by placing a strip of masking tape on the edge of a ray of sunlight falling on the floor. Observe it in 10 minutes, 30 minutes, and in 3 hours. Discuss the reason for the movement of daylight with child.
- Stick 4 toothpicks into the sides of a sweet potato at about the center. Place potato in water in a glass jar. Watch the plant grow and have child record what he sees in words or drawings as the weeks pass.
- Put celery stalks with leaves in a jar of colored water (food coloring). After a few days record what happens.
- Collect many different kinds of seeds and make a collage. Read to discover what will grow from them.
- Using a magnet, have child try to pull paper clips out of a glass jar without touching the paper clips.
- Find interesting rocks. Look up pictures in a book on fossils. Try to match pictures with the fossils found.
- Find a large rock. Wrap it in a piece of cloth. Crack the rock with a household hammer. Examine, compare, and discuss the new pieces of rock.
- Color 3 or 4 bowls of sand with chalk dust. Make a design with glue on a piece of cardboard. Cover glue with the colored sand. Discuss the meaning of the different colors of sand and rock on a mountain.
- Go on a "space" hike. Take along the supplies an astronaut would need on a space mission.

- Talk about lack of gravity in space. Discuss what would happen to crumbs from your food.
- Make a list of the pros and cons of going into space. What if you had to circle the earth for months. How could you prevent boredom?
- Learn about crickets. Collect them in a jar with holes in the lid. Use clumps of soil and grass. Use small paper cup to hold food such as apples, raisins, and cereal. Crickets will come out only at night.
- Put a firefly in a small plastic bos. Us a magnifying glass to look at the light at the end of the abdomen. This light does not give off heat.
- Watch a ladybug walk. Put a drop of food coloring in a teaspoon of water. Put water in an old saucer. Put ladybug in the colored water. Lift bug out carefully onto a piece of white paper. Study the pattern of the bug's walk.
- Polish dirty pennies by putting dirty penny in a cup. Pour in 1/2 cup vinegar. Count to 10 slowly. Is there any change? Then add a teaspoon of salt and mix well. Count to 10 again. Now what changes occur?
- Bend light with fiberoptic wire (found at hobby shops). First read The Tree that Stayed Up Until Next Christmas by Robert Kraus. Turn on a string of small Christmas tree lights. Holding the fiberoptic wire at both ends, place the center on a lightbulb. Does the light travel through the wire? Then place one end of the wire on a bulb and look at the other end. Does light travel through the wire? This is also how current laser units work.
- Make a dinosaur book with drawings and reports.

Social Studies

- Show pictures of an old community or downtown area. Discuss the differences in the town today.
- Using an old photograph, start a discussion about what life was like when...Next read a story about that particular period in history.
- Make a booklet on "My Friends from Around the World". Child chooses three places she would like to visit and does a report on those places. Perhaps a pen pal can be found from one of the countries.
- Help your child tape record interviews with elderly relatives and friends about their lives. Keep the tapes in a special place and listen to them occasionally. Talk about what you learned together.

ESL:

Have a "Family Day" when adult students and their preschoolers come to class to develop gross motor skills, extend body vocabulary, and reinforce movement concepts through action songs like "If You're Happy and You Know It", "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes", and "Hokey Pokey". Parents trace child's body onto paper, and children complete an obstacle

course. Everyone listens to the reading of the book Me by Beth Clure and Helen Rumsey.

Communication Skills:

- Communication is a two way street. It is very difficult to listen to another person, especially if you disagree with their values, way of living or communicating. To help improve communication, we must allow ourselves out of our comfort zones.
- Use unfinished sentence stems to obtain information not readily and openly communicated orally. Examples: The thing I like to learn best is ... I never knew that... People hurt other's feelings by... When people are upset and hurt I ... I have difficulty trying to deal with...
- Teacher gives each student a 4x6 card or a replica of a Western Union Telegram form. students write a telegram to an important person that can bring about change like a congressman, doctor, principal. The message is to be 50 words or less. They begin "I urge you to ..." Later read telegrams in class. Discuss telegrams. Tape telegrams to classroom walls.
- Spend a day with a real professional in the work world Such as a welfare worker, clergyperson, nurse, or teacher. Describe the day to the class.
- Wear old clothing and sit in the waiting room of the State Employment Office. Listen, observe and talk to some of the people sitting next to you. Report what you heard and learned to the class.
- Go to an inner city elementary school and read a story to a class or small group of children. Get the children talking about what worries them.
- Work on a political campaign during an election year.
- Take a trip to a nursing home. Interview patients about life was like when they were young.
- Go to a local fast food restaurant by a local junior high that has just been dismissed. Listen and observe what the student's main concerns are.
- Read "Manchild in a Promised Land" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou. Discuss growing up black in America.
- Brainstorm with school drop outs about how to keep kids in school.
- Create a personal coat of arms. Consider symbols to represent important values in life, goals, and accomplishments.
- Have everyone in class share the personal motto they live by. Discuss.
- Write answers to the question, "Who am I " on paper. Let small groups discuss the meaning of life and how to change things we are not satisfied with.
- Play a game. How would my life be different if...(someone handed me a tax free gift of a million dollars)...(I had the powers of superman)...(I could change my appearance)...
- Bring in a current pop song that truly relates your feelings on a subject. Discuss why pop music is such an important means of expression.

- Interview a parent of a severely handicapped child to find out what life is like for that family. Ask how an outsider could help make life easier for the family.

Geography:

- Use a map to follow a favorite sports team during its travels.
- Research to find out why teams have the nicknames they do.
- Locate current events on a world map.
- Plan a trip and plot it on a map.
- Mark a map with pictures of relatives on the cities where they live.
- Cut out the states (or nations) to make a puzzle to reassemble.
- Plan an imaginary trip by boat down rivers and lakes. How far can you go?
- Make a map of your neighborhood.
- Look at a map of your town. Plot three routes to the shopping center.